

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 157

BY SENATOR DUPLESSIS

A RESOLUTION

To express the sincere and heartfelt condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana to the family and friends of Jean Arnette Benjamin Vappie on the occasion of her passing, and to celebrate and record for posterity her life and legacy as a devoted wife, mother, educator, dance instructor, and community leader who touched many lives through her faith, dedication, and service.

WHEREAS, Jean Arnette Benjamin was born on December 22, 1951, in New Orleans, Louisiana; Jean's strong faith in God began with her baptism and confirmation at Corpus Christi Catholic Church at an early age; and

WHEREAS, she received a Catholic education from Corpus Christi Elementary School, Xavier University Preparatory, and Xavier University of Louisiana, where she earned a Bachelor of Education in Health and Physical Education; and

WHEREAS, during her senior year of college, Jean pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha with the Epsilon Tau Chapter at Xavier University; and

WHEREAS, she was honored with a fellowship to the University of Northern Iowa, where she obtained her master's degree in Health, Physical Education, and Dance; and

WHEREAS, Jean began her teaching career with the Orleans Parish School System at Alfred G. Priestley Junior High and concluded her twenty-year career at Francis W. Gregory Junior High School, where she also coached track and field and sponsored the majorettes; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Jean, her sister Velda, and their late mother, Dr. Velma Benjamin, founded The Benjamin's School of Dance & Gymnastics and The Benjamin's Adult Fitness Center, providing instruction in ballet, tap, jazz, baton twirling, and gymnastics; and

WHEREAS, The Benjamin's School of Dance & Gymnastics hosted twenty-nine annual dance recitals, presenting record crowds and Broadway-style extravaganzas complete with the pageantry of a queen and her court, priding themselves on preparing students for the stage and life experiences related to the arts; and

WHEREAS, Jean married her elementary school sweetheart, retired Lieutenant (NOPD) Russell Mark Vappie, and this union was blessed with a daughter, Beverly Alice; and

WHEREAS, Jean often expressed that her greatest gift from God was their daughter, Beverly, and she and Russell supported every aspect of Beverly's life with love and devotion, celebrating her graduation from Spelman College in 2016, with great joy and pride; and

WHEREAS, Jean was diagnosed with breast cancer twice and emerged victorious on both occasions; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, she and Elizabeth Bridges co-founded the Benjamin & Yancy Foundation, Incorporated in loving memory of Jean's mother, Dr. Velma Colbert Benjamin, and Elizabeth's sister, Jacqueline (Jackie) Bridges Yancy who lost their battles with cancer; the foundation promotes early cancer detection and offers screenings, therapy, and educational support to individuals dealing with breast and prostate cancer; and

WHEREAS, Jean loved decorating her home during all holidays, especially Mardi Gras, attending parades with her father and marveling at the colorful costumes and detailed beadwork of New Orleans' own Mardi Gras Indians; and

WHEREAS, Jean enjoyed hosting family Thanksgiving dinners as a yearly tradition and was a proud aunt to Cori, Keyana, and Trey; Jean's devotion to the Blessed Mother was evident in her weekly rosary prayers and her hosting of the May crowning for several years; and

WHEREAS, Jean entered peacefully into eternal rest on Friday, May 24, 2024, leaving behind a legacy of faith, dedication, and service.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express the sincere and heartfelt condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana to the family and friends of Jean Arnette Benjamin Vappie on the occasion of her passing, and celebrates and records for posterity her life and legacy as a devoted wife, mother, educator, dance instructor, and community leader who touched many lives through her faith, dedication, and service.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Beverly Alice Vappie.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE